

British Attempts to Forge a Political Partnership with the Kremlin, 1942–3

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Abstract

In February 1943, the British Foreign Office launched an initiative to open discussions with the Soviet Union on postwar aims, a subject which had been off-limits since the disputes over Soviet frontiers during the negotiation of the Anglo–Soviet Treaty in early 1942. Joseph Stalin's response was to treat the approach seriously, and to request concrete proposals that would lead to a firm formal agreement. The British immediately pulled back, and no progress on political issues was attempted until later in the war. This article analyses this rarely-discussed episode, focusing on how British indecisiveness, at a crucial stage of the war, and the lack of political will of Anthony Eden, led to confusion and mixed messages being sent to the Soviet government. Attempts to build a solid political component to the wartime alliance and to reach agreement on the key issues of a postwar European settlement prior to the end of the war were delayed not so much by the ideological gulf between the allies as their different cultures of diplomacy and the customary processes of their bureaucracies. Ultimately progress was made when each began to adopt elements of the approach of the other.

Keywords

Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Foreign Office, Grand Alliance, Second World War, Joseph Stalin

For many years historiography of the Anglo–Soviet–US alliance in the Second World War tended to take its direction from Cold War scholarship, as the alliance period was seen as the prelude to, or indeed origins of, that conflict. In recent years there has been a growth in interest in the functioning of the alliance in its own right, though not without losing awareness of the Cold War that followed its breakdown.

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It is 50 years since British historian Donald Cameron Watt published *Personalities and Policies*, a call to focus on the personal aspect of diplomacy and the formulation of policies in foreign policy-making bodies.¹ It was an approach that to many at the time seemed old-fashioned. Of late, there has been a revival of interest in the personal, now addressing issues of culture and personal connections, notably emotional and psychological. It has been argued that the Grand Alliance, as it became known, was deeply dependent on personal relationships.² Much of the attention so far has been devoted to the top level of policy-making – the commanding figures of Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Part of this turn, though, has been to identify the role of bureaucrats, officials and others at a lower level and the institutional cultures they inhabited and which influenced the way they went about the day-to-day conduct of the alliance. Much remains to be unravelled, and in particular more attention needs to be paid to the British–Soviet side, an aspect that can sometimes be sidelined when Cold War concerns lead scholars to be most focused on the Soviet–US relationship.

Although there is still a tendency to speak of ‘the British attitude, ‘American assumptions’ ‘the Soviet approach’, the evidence is now clear that within each of the wartime Big Three states there were conflicting viewpoints, cultural approaches and ideological assumptions.³ Notwithstanding the continuing focus on Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin as the orchestrators of the Grand Alliance, it now needs to be acknowledged that none of these leaders (not even Stalin) controlled all aspects of alliance cooperation. As Mark Stoler pointed out in a recent historiographical essay, there remains a shortage of in-depth analysis of the many official-level interactions and consultations.⁴ In many ways these interactions *were* the alliance as much as the high-profile summit meetings that have attracted the most attention.⁵

Some time ago, soon after Soviet documents began to be available, it was argued that a more coherent and sincere attempt at building political cooperation by the British in the early period of the alliance – late 1941 to early 1943 – would have

1 D.C. Watt, *Personalities and Policies. Studies in the Formulation of British Foreign Policy* (London 1964).

2 F. Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances. How Personal Politics Helped Start the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ 2012).

3 F. Costigliola, “‘Mixed Up’ and ‘Contact’: Culture and Emotion among the Allies in the Second World War”, *International History Review*, 20 (1998), 802–5; F.J. Harbutt, *Yalta 1945. Europe at the Crossroads* (Cambridge 2010). M.E. Glantz, *FDR and the Soviet Union: The President's Battles Over Foreign Policy* (Lawrence, KS 2005); V. Pechatnov, ‘The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain’, Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 13; M. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC 2000); G. Roberts, ‘Stalin and the Grand Alliance: Public Discourse, Private Dialogues and the Direction of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1941–1947’, *Slovo*, 13 (2001) 1–15. See also Chapters 1 and 2 of R.J. Aldrich, *The Hidden Hand: Britain, America and Cold War Secret Intelligence* (London 2001).

4 M.A. Stoler, ‘Wartime Conferences’ in T.W. Zeiler and D.M. DuBois (eds), *A Companion to World War II* (New York, NY 2013), 450.

5 M. Sherry, review of Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances*, *H-Diplo Roundtable Review*, XIV, 8, 25–6. Available at: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XIV-8.pdf> (accessed 17 January 2017).

encouraged a definite inclination in the Soviet Government towards genuine cooperation. Gabriel Gorodetsky praised Sir Stafford Cripps's attempts to do this. Cripps, British ambassador to the USSR from 1940 until March 1942, was stymied, in Gorodetsky's view, by the hostility of the conservative and anti-Soviet Churchill.⁶ While subsequent scholarship has shown Churchill's attitude to be more ambiguous than that, there remain significant questions about what factors actually impeded the development of fruitful political cooperation.⁷ Was it indeed a matter of unbridgeable ideological differences? Was it incompetent, poorly directed and inconsistent diplomacy? Could stronger leadership have imposed a coherence on allied policy and maximized the chances of getting Soviet cooperation that encompassed a mitigation of Soviet tendencies towards unilateralism? These continue to be potent questions, and this article presents evidence from one attempt at a *démarche* from the British side to demonstrate the forces at work and present some answers.

This British initiative came at a key moment in the course of the war and the alliance, at the time of the Soviet victory at Stalingrad at the end of 1942 and the start of 1943. It is a relatively little-known episode in the Anglo-Soviet relationship, but it raises larger issues regarding the nature, conduct and development of the alliance. When it has been mentioned in the literature, it is framed as an incident in relations between Winston Churchill and his foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, because Eden approved an approach to the Soviet leaders without involving Churchill. The British ambassador to the USSR, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, returned from leave in Britain in February 1943, and immediately posed the Soviet leaders a series of questions about postwar Europe. Stalin responded by suggesting formal talks, but nothing further happened at this time. It is generally concluded that the initiative came to nothing because Churchill, on finding out about it, made Eden drop it.⁸ However, there is more to the affair than this, and it is of greater significance than merely as an illustration of the nature of the Churchill-Eden relationship. Close study of the process and development of the approach to the Soviets and their response reveals a British government at a crucial point of its wartime diplomacy, and a Foreign Office (FO) divided over relations with Britain's enigmatic partner, the Soviet Union – and a Soviet leadership

6 G. Gorodetsky, *Stafford Cripps' Mission to Moscow 1940–42* (Cambridge 1984), 284; A. Filitov, 'The Soviet Union and the Grand Alliance: The Internal Dimension of Foreign Policy' in G. Gorodetsky (ed.), *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917–1991. A Retrospective* (London 1994), 99–101.

7 J. Charmley, *Churchill. The End of Glory* (London 1993); D. Carlton, *Churchill and the Soviet Union* (Manchester 2000) view Churchill as being consistently driven by anti-Bolshevism. Different perspectives are offered in R. Edmonds, *The Big Three* (London 1991); D. Reynolds, 'Churchill, Roosevelt and the Stalin Enigma', in *From World War to Cold War. Churchill, Roosevelt and the International History of the 1940s* (Oxford 2006), 235–48; M. Kitchen, 'Winston Churchill and the Soviet Union During the Second World War', *Historical Journal*, 30 (1987), 415–36; M.H. Folly, *Churchill, Whitehall and the Soviet Union* (Basingstoke 2000). D. Dilks, *Churchill and Company. Allies and Rivals in War and Peace* (London 2012), 163–72.

8 G. Ross, *The Foreign Office and the Kremlin* (Cambridge 1984), 32; M. Kitchen, *British Policy Towards the Soviet Union During the Second World War* (London 1986), 150.

inclined to cooperation, but with a definition of 'alliance' centred on formal agreement on political and strategic objectives.

To be sure, the formal foundation of the alliance was a political declaration: the United Nations declaration of 1 January 1942, which in turn referenced the Atlantic Charter of August 1941 as the definition of the political aims of the participants. This was, however, so generalized a statement as to be effectively meaningless when it came to more concrete political issues, such as the restoration of specific European states and frontiers, and the political structure of these states.⁹

It was against this background that the FO and Eden attempted to develop a political coalition with the Soviet Union. While its actual status as one of the 'peace-loving nations' referred to in the Atlantic Charter was more than a little provisional in British minds, this was actually a further incentive to try and bind the USSR into structures of cooperation. The first attempt began in November 1941, and like those that were to follow, was built on the realist assumption that if Germany was to be restrained in the postwar world, the USSR was needed as a partner in this task – preferably with the USA too, but fears that the USA might adopt some form of isolationism after the war, as it was perceived to have done after the First World War, meant that Britain could not afford to ignore the USSR.

An exploratory mission by Eden to Moscow followed in December 1941, during which Stalin proposed a political alliance and a formal recognition of his territorial conquests of 1939–41. Eden had gone in the hopes of satisfying Soviet desire for a British political commitment to them with a vague declaratory treaty. Stalin had welcomed the idea of a treaty, but wished for it to cover concrete issues, such as frontiers and war aims: he preferred, he said 'arithmetic' over 'algebra'. The British noted that at the first meeting with Eden on 16 December, Stalin spoke in some detail about what he thought should be the postwar shape of Europe, and proposed they should attach a secret protocol to the proposed treaty, outlining specifics. With regard to Germany, Stalin thought it a necessity to detach the Rhineland from Prussia, to include East Prussia in Poland (except the Tilsit area, to go to the USSR) and to award all the Sudetenland to Czechoslovakia. Austria should be a separate state, and possibly Bavaria also. In subsequent months, this was to be interpreted in the British government as meaning that essentially Stalin wished to break up the German state. None of this was set out in a formal document, at the time or subsequently.¹⁰ Stalin was recorded as saying 'If certain of the countries of Europe wish to federate then the Soviet Union will have no objection to such a course.' It was unusual at this stage of the war to get such frank statements from the USSR on these issues. Consequently, Stalin's statements, or rather the British records of those statements, were vested with a great deal of authority. As British

9 D.J. Bercuson and H.H. Herwig, *One Christmas in Washington. Churchill and Roosevelt Forge the Grand Alliance* (London 2005), 217–18.

10 Eden conversations in Moscow, December 1941 WP(42) 8 British War Cabinet Records, British National Archives (TNA) CAB66/20. All documents cited hereafter are from TNA unless otherwise stated.

officials grappled with early planning for these issues, their speculations about Soviet goals were all built upon these statements by Stalin.

An extensive and acrimonious debate had followed Eden's mission, between sections of the British and US governments over Soviet frontier demands.¹¹ These problems that had arisen when negotiating the treaty reinforced a strong inclination to leave consideration of postwar matters until later. The official head of the FO, Permanent Under-Secretary Sir Alexander Cadogan, was of this view, and it was one he shared with the prime minister, whom, perhaps not coincidentally, he often accompanied on foreign visits: he went to Moscow with him in August 1942, for example, whereas Eden did not.¹² The final form of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty was designed by Cadogan. Eden had been glad to receive Cadogan's alternative draft at the time, as it offered a way to head off vocal domestic political opposition to a more specific arrangement recognising Soviet frontiers.¹³ Eden was also pleased to have obtained what the FO called a 'self-denying ordinance' from the Soviets, wherein both agreed not to reach bilateral arrangements with minor European allies without full consultation. The Anglo-Soviet Treaty had no political provisions at all, let alone a secret protocol containing such specific goals. It followed the line of the Charter and the UN Declaration in its generalized commitment to fighting on against Germany and postwar collaboration.¹⁴

However, not all in the FO were content to leave postwar issues until later. The exiled allied governments in London, concerned about their political futures, tended to raise questions about such matters, and it was embarrassing, and not

11 L.E. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (London 1962), 191; W.F. Kimball, *Forged in War. Roosevelt, Churchill and the Second World War* (New York, NY 1995), 137–8, 145–6. S. Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin. The Soviet Union, Britain and the Origins of the Grand Alliance* (Chapel Hill, NC 1988), 232–6; Eden paper, 'Forthcoming Discussions with the Soviet Government', 26 November 1941, WP(41)288, FO371/29472/N6835; Eden conversation with U.S. Ambassador Winant, 4 December 1941, FO371/29472/N6893; Winant to Hull, 4 December 1941, State Department Papers, United States National Archives, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG59), 740.0011/17085. Churchill to Eden, 8 January 1942, FO371/32874/N108; Aide-memoire to Winant, 25 February 1942, CAB127/75. Welles conversation with Halifax 20 February 1942, *Foreign Relations of the United States 1942* vol. 3, 522, 539–42; J. McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (New York, NY 2002), 30–3.

12 Churchill's dictum to 'first catch your hare' encapsulates this theme for many people, E. Barker, *Churchill and Eden at War* (London 1978), 307. Eden's private secretary, Oliver Harvey (an FO official), who was himself keen to push Eden into looking at postwar issues, noted Churchill's lack of interest, as did Hugh Dalton: J. Harvey (ed.), *The War Diaries of Oliver Harvey 1941–1945* (London 1978) [hereafter Harvey diary], 168, diary 15 October 1942; B. Pimlott, (ed.), *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton 1940–45* (London 1986), 519–20 [hereafter cited as Dalton diary] diary 17, 18 November 1942.

13 Eden paper, 'Policy Towards Russia', WP (42) 48, 28 January 1942, FO371/32875/N563; Duff Cooper to Eden, 22 April 1942, Stuart (Government Chief Whip) to Churchill 22 May 1942, Eden to Churchill, 27 April 1942 FO954/25A; D. Carlton, *Anthony Eden* (London 1982), 196. D. Dilks (ed.), *The Diary of Sir Alexander Cadogan 1938–45* (London 1975), 452–4 [cited hereafter as Cadogan diary] diary for 19, 23, 24 May. A draft clause endorsing the idea of confederations was agreed during the negotiations of the Treaty in May, before the whole draft was set aside in favour of the Cadogan version that avoided any political issues, FO note on discussions in May 1942 FO181/968/16.

14 O.A. Rzheshesky, *War and Diplomacy. The Making of the Grand Alliance. From Stalin's Archives* (Amsterdam 1996. Trans. T. Sorokina), 102, 106; Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin*, 257–63.

good for Britain's standing with them, to keep avoiding giving answers. The British military, though much busier, also occasionally sought political advice – often because they in turn had been asked about postwar defence matters.¹⁵ The FO initially answered in an ad hoc manner, but became concerned during 1942 to regularize consideration of such questions so that authoritative direction could be given – the fear was that if the FO did not take the lead, someone else would, to the detriment of the FO's bureaucratic standing as the prime shaper of Britain's foreign policy. As a consequence, against Cadogan's continuing misgivings, a new department, which came to be named Economic and Reconstruction (E & R), was established under one of the FO's young rising stars, Gladwyn Jebb, who was returning from an eventful secondment assisting Hugh Dalton at the Ministry of Economic Warfare.¹⁶ Jebb interpreted his remit broadly, and engaged energetically with the task of formulating Britain's postwar policy. The outcome was the 'Four Power Plan' in October 1942. This was the first, and perhaps the most important, of a number of elements that came together to produce the approach to the Soviets in February 1943.¹⁷

The Four Power Plan asserted that the future organization of international politics needed to centre on great power cooperation. This cooperation would both overarch and underpin any regional arrangements.¹⁸ The central point of the plan was that the maintenance of peace had to be based upon the realities of power. The League of Nations was depicted as a flawed concept because it did not reflect this. Any new organization had to be built around the cooperation of the powerful. While China was included out of deference to US preferences, essentially the concept advanced by Jebb and presented by Eden to the War Cabinet was a three-power system. It could thus only work if the USSR played a part. The plan affirmed that there was much to gain from the Soviets deciding to follow a path of cooperation with Britain (with or without the USA) in the reconstruction and policing of Europe after the war. The alternative that would face Britain would probably be the resurgence of the German threat. It was argued that this would be a consequence whether the Soviets lapsed into isolationism or sought unilateral expansion: either Soviet course would drive smaller European states to seek protection from Germany.

While acknowledging the possibility of these alternative scenarios, Jebb argued that it was a reasonable assumption that it would be prepared to cooperate – and that British policy should be designed around making this as certain as possible.¹⁹

15 FO draft memorandum to Oliver Stanley, January 1942 FO371/32422/W765.

16 Dalton diary 2 June 1942, 5 September 1942.

17 S. Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office: Gladwyn Jebb and the Shaping of the Modern World* (Leyden 2008), 149–59; Dalton diary 6 December 1942; Lord Gladwyn, *The Memoirs of Lord Gladwyn* (London 1972), 108–24.

18 The paper, numbered WP(42)516, was discussed by the War Cabinet on 27 November 1942, WM(42)161st meeting CAB65/28.

19 Richard Law, Foreign Office minister, noted on 22 September 1942, 'The American attitude to China is almost exactly the same as our attitude towards Russia. It's not only a question of popular sentiment. But just as we feel that there can be no settlement in Europe so long as there is that vast

The Four Power Plan paper based this assumption on the British record of Stalin's statements to Eden in December 1941 and concluded that he had indicated at that time that he preferred the cooperation option. The Soviets were, however, perceived to be doubtful whether Britain was also committed to this, and to be speculating that there were British alternative policies of either organizing Europe against the USSR, as a renewed *cordon sanitaire*, with Germany as a key element, or coordinating closely with the US with the aim of excluding the USSR from the fruits of victory: sitting back and allowing Germany and the USSR to fight each other to exhaustion and then stepping in to dictate the peace. Stalin was believed to have only vague plans at present. Jebb and his postwar planning colleagues argued that if action were now to be taken speedily, there was an opportunity to shape Soviet views, while it was also seen to be time to disabuse the Soviets of their suspicions about Britain's preference for either of the other two options.²⁰

Anthony Eden had come to the Foreign Office in January 1941 with a strong belief in his ability to improve Anglo-Soviet relations.²¹ This had been undimmed by his somewhat rough handling by Stalin. Eden endorsed the general approach of Jebb and his followers, and commented on 11 November, in a telling phrase, that it was vital to break through 'the crust of suspicion'. Even though this suspicion could not be completely removed, this must be tried: and it must be done during the war.²² The E & R department's view also gained support from Christopher Warner, the head of the department of the FO that advised on policy to the USSR, the Northern Department.²³ Cadogan's second-in-command, Sir Orme Sargent, a man of usually pessimistic, even cynical, inclination, fell into line behind his foreign secretary. A distinct difference in attitude began to open up between him and Cadogan to such an extent that Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, the director of the Political Warfare Executive and an informal advisor to the FO on Soviet and Czech matters, characterized it as no less than two separate approaches to foreign policy within the FO.²⁴ The existence of this split becomes evident as we examine the progress of the issue of an approach to the Soviet Government in the succeeding months.

When Eden first presented the Four Power Plan to Churchill in late October, the auguries for approaching the Soviets on the postwar issue did not seem good.

question mark in the East, so the Americans feel that there can be no permanent stability in the Pacific so long as China is a great question mark in the West.' FO371/31525/U742.

20 The Four Power Plan 20 October 1942 FO371/31525/U742. The paper concluded with the homily that only by making up their minds as to what they really wanted could Britain hope to be the master and not the victim of events, ending with the Latin tag, *Ducunt volentem fata nolentum trahunt* ('The fates drag the unwilling and lead the willing man'). His biographer notes that Jebb was a great power man, rather contemptuous of small nations, and a believer in the realism of the Soviet leadership, Greenwood, *Titan at the Foreign Office*, 168-69, Jebb minute 5 February 1943 FO371/35396/U2329.

21 Eden to Cripps 17 January 1941 FO954/24B; Carlton, *Anthony Eden*, 63, 148.

22 Eden minute 11 November FO371/32884/N5608. See also Warner memorandum 8 November 1942 FO371/32885/N6539.

23 Warner minute 4 November 1942 FO371/31535/U1742.

24 K. Young (ed.), *The Diaries of Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart 1939-1965* (London, 1980), 236 [hereafter Lockhart diary] diary for 13 April 1943.

The absence of a second front in Europe, and the crisis on the Soviet-German front meant that relations had soured.²⁵ Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky had been exceedingly active and indiscreet in his second front agitation. The Soviet press had raised the matter of Rudolf Hess, making snide comments about British failures to put Hitler's deputy on trial. Maisky's colleague Alexander Bogomolov took a truculent attitude to the allied governments-in-exile to which he was assigned.²⁶ Churchill responded to Eden's paper by saying that he had no time for such issues, though he then proceeded to set out his own thoughts on the postwar issue. Rather than accept the idea that Britain could influence Soviet tendencies, he simply cautioned that the USSR's future stance was uncertain. He made a point of expressing concern that Europe not be exposed to domination by 'Soviet barbarism'.²⁷ The good feeling he had had about Stalin when he came away from Moscow in August had mostly been dissipated by surly communications from the dictator, though Churchill (wrongly) excused Stalin himself by speculating that there had been a power-shift in the USSR and that the military had gained influence.²⁸ He was, however, prepared to reply to Stalin with gruff communications of his own. Stalin for his part complained to Maisky about Churchill's uncooperative attitude and motivations, confirming that the British belief that the Soviets suspected them of sitting idle while the Soviets exhausted themselves fighting Germany was accurate. Stalin depicted Churchill to be wanting 'an easy war'.²⁹

However, Stalin himself then changed the atmosphere. It had been felt that the Soviets were not paying much attention to issues beyond the immediate conduct of the war. The FO was alert for signs that this position had changed – and alert too for indications whether when such Soviet ideas developed, they would take them in the direction of unilateral solutions to political issues, or whether Stalin intended to shape his policy within the context of the alliance. The latter appeared to have been the policy Stalin had in mind when he spoke to Eden, and, for what it was worth, had been formalized in the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. The downside of the Cadogan version of the treaty was that the commitment to cooperation was simply a generalized statement of intent. In the months that followed, nothing more concrete had developed, producing uncertainty about what the Soviets might understand by cooperation, and the associated speculation about where their policies might be heading.

In this situation, any clues to Soviet policy were eagerly grasped – and tended to be given greater weight than the Soviets actually intended. There was no more

25 WM(42)145th meeting Confidential Annexe 26 October 1942 CAB65/32; Eden to Churchill 19 October and 8 November 1942 PREM4/100/7.

26 Sargent minute 8 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8821. Bogomolov was inclined to a bullying attitude towards the minor allies in London, and was regularly casting aspersions on the whole confederations project.

27 Churchill to Eden 21 October 1942 PREM4/100/7.

28 Churchill to Attlee 14 August 1942 FO800/300; Churchill to Roosevelt 24 October 1942 FO954/25B.

29 Stalin telegram to Maisky 19 October 1942, in *Советско-Английские Отношения во Время Великой Отечественной Войны* (Moscow, 1983) vol. 1 Document 147.

authoritative sign than a statement by Stalin. It was deemed highly significant that in his keynote speech celebrating the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, on 6 November 1942, he went out of his way to mention the Anglo–Soviet–US coalition in positive terms, speaking of ‘a steady rapprochement among the members of the coalition, and the development of it into a strong fighting alliance’. Not only did he thus provide a clue regarding the cooperation issue, he also supplied a tantalizing glimpse into Soviet views on a key future political issue, by making a clear distinction between the ‘Hitlerites’ and the German people as a whole. He ridiculed the idea that an object of the war was to destroy the German state and people: ‘we are not burdened with the problem of destroying Germany, because it is no more possible to destroy Germany than it is possible to destroy Russia. But to destroy the Hitlerite State is possible and necessary.’ Stalin summarized the political aims of the coalition:

The programme of the Anglo-Soviet-American coalition is as follows: - the abolition of racial exclusiveness, the equality of nations and inviolability of their territories, the liberation of the enslaved nations and the restoration of their sovereign rights, the right of establishing whatever regime they like, economic assistance to the countries which have suffered and help to be given to them in achieving material welfare, the restoration of democratic liberty, and the destruction of the Hitlerite regime.³⁰

Stalin followed up his speech with a further public statement on 13 November. This was in the form of an open letter to Henry Cassidy, the Associated Press Correspondent in Moscow. In it, Stalin expressed a very positive opinion of the Allied invasion of North Africa, which contrasted with the earlier Soviet line that Operation Torch made little difference to the main conflict of the war on the Soviet–German front and that a second front was still not being delivered as promised.³¹ Indeed, Stalin’s new line took Maisky by surprise, for he gave a speech on 14 November following the old one.³² The impact on the Moscow streets was immediate: British service personnel found themselves being saluted frequently by Soviet soldiers, which had previously been a rarity.³³ Stalin’s positive references to the Allies came as a refreshing change, and injected greater energy into attempts to seize the moment and make a renewed attempt to build a workable, rounded alliance.

30 Stalin speech 6 November 1942, Warner minute 7 November 1942 FO371/32923/N5782. It has gone unremarked that this was the most complete and sweeping statement of the war aims of the Grand Alliance made to date – it was certainly a fuller one than that made at the time of the formal declaration of the United Nations on 1 January 1942.

31 *Daily Express* (14 November 1942). The idea that this represented the triumph of one school of thought within the Soviet leadership over an uncooperative tendency is advanced in FO memorandum 29 December 1942 FO371/36954/N66; Wilson 23 November 1942 FO371/32892/N5953 – Andrew Rothstein of TASS suggested – and this was passed on by Smollett of the Ministry of Information, a Soviet agent of influence – that Stalin was arguing the case for collaboration against his own ‘left-wing deviationists’.

32 Maisky speech reported in *The Observer* 15 November 1942. Armine Dew of the Northern Department described Maisky’s effort as ‘disgusting’. Dew minute 16 November 1942 FO371/32916/N5842.

33 Rear-Admiral Miles, Naval Mission War Diary 15 November 1942 ADM199/1102.

Stalin's authoritative statements gave British policy-makers something to get to work on, and furthermore suggested that the time was ripe to act upon Eden's *obiter dictum* that action had to be taken during the war to build the habit of cooperation and thereby break down the crust of suspicion as much as possible. That Stalin's comments might principally have been prompted by the desperate plight of the Soviet 62nd army in Stalingrad, pinned down to just three factories on the west bank of the Volga, seems to have passed these British analysts by.³⁴

Also supplying impetus towards action with the Soviets, but from more negative presumptions, were two further aspects. One was the US dimension. The mid-term congressional elections in early November had increased Republican representation, while not overturning the Democrat majorities in either House or Senate. However, a resurgence of conservatism was evident, and this did nothing to lessen uncertainty as to whether active US involvement in the postwar settlement in Europe could be assumed, or whether, conversely, the US would distance itself from European affairs after the war.³⁵ Should that situation transpire, then cooperation with the Soviets became even more imperative, if German resurgence was to be prevented.³⁶

The second aspect was promoted by ambassador Clark Kerr, who returned from Moscow on leave on 27 November.³⁷ He was greatly concerned that it was not understood in London how much political significance the Soviets attached to the second front, and, more pertinently in Clark Kerr's eyes, there had not been any really serious effort to explain fully and frankly the difficulties surrounding an invasion of western Europe, nor had there been any attempt to incorporate the Soviets into the developing structure of Anglo-US cooperation. The failure to treat the Soviets as equals was to be one of Clark Kerr's most constant complaints.³⁸ He felt that it fuelled the Soviet suspicion that the western powers hoped the Soviets would defeat the Germans but be exhausted in the process, leaving the Anglo-Americans free to shape the postwar settlement with no regard for Soviet interests. The consequence of not taking action to remove this suspicion would be a Soviet rejection of cooperation, with its associated voluntary limitation of actions in the common good, in favour of isolationism. Clark Kerr voiced these opinions, with the authority of having come straight from Moscow, to anyone who would

34 Stalin was also, of course, aware of the imminent launch of Operation Uranus, the counter-encirclement of the German 6th Army, which commenced on 19 November.

35 P. Boyle, 'Reversion to Isolationism? The British Foreign Office View of American Attitudes to Isolationism during World War II', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 8, 1 (1979), 169, 172–3, 175.

36 Ronald minute 30 March 1943 FO371/35366/U1430; see also Harvey diary 24 May 1942, Dalton diary 6 July 1942, FO to Halifax 26 March 1942 FO371/32878/N1653.

37 D. Gillies, *Radical Diplomat. The Life of Archibald Clark Kerr, Lord Inverchapel, 1882–1951* (London 1999), 141.

38 Clark Kerr said the Soviets would not make a separate peace so long as Britain and the US continued on the offensive: they would not accept any deal that surrendered any Soviet territory – indeed, he said, they aspired to enlarge their territory after the war. They feared being too weak to have a say at the peace conference, and wished to be consulted on all aspects of the peace settlement. That was why they showed anxiety about Darlan and Hess. A certain section in the USSR feared possible British cooperation with Germany against them and believed there were influences favouring this in Britain, JIC(42)58th meeting 1 December 1942 CAB81/90.

listen – including the Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Intelligence Committee and Dominions High Commissioners. He raised the spectre of Soviet isolationism leading to the conclusion of a separate peace with Germany. While never convinced by the fashionable idea that there were different schools of thought in the Politburo, he did emphasize that while Stalin might incline towards friendship with the West, Vyacheslav Molotov, the commissar for foreign affairs, ‘was our enemy’.³⁹ The worst case postwar scenario in December 1942, therefore, was that far from being part of a three great power cooperative effort, Britain, weakened by war, would be left to contain Germany alone. This all gave added strength to the urge to open political channels of communication with the Soviet government, to encourage a cooperative tendency, assuage suspicions, and head off the possibility of isolationism or unilateralism.

An aspect of this cooperation that was attracting a considerable amount of attention from Eden and his officials was the future of eastern Europe. They found the idea of confederations of east and south-eastern European states an attractive one, to provide a measure of strength and stability to regions that recent history had shown contained the seeds of conflicts that were not easily limited to a local level. Such groupings would avoid the problems of multi-national empires like Austria-Hungary, in that national groups would retain their sovereignty, while recognizing at the same time that cooperation on matters of defence and security, and hopefully trade, would make themselves less vulnerable to attempts by their powerful neighbours to dominate them. The exile governments in London showed interest in such schemes, having been made starkly aware of their vulnerability by the events of the war.⁴⁰ The hope was that this lesson would help to overcome the tensions that had existed in the interwar years between states like Poland and Czechoslovakia. There is no doubt that one of the attractions of the idea was that it might serve to keep the USSR from spreading its influence after the defeat of Germany – but that was so obvious that it was perceived immediately that the Soviets would be inherently suspicious of the scheme.

Faced with such a delicate position, older FO officials tended to default to inaction, inhibited by their conflicting concerns on the one hand not to alienate the Soviets, while at the same time encouraging the creation of confederations and not wishing to cold-shoulder the exile governments. Thus, in May 1942, when issues of eastern Europe were in the forefront of British minds during the negotiation of the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, Orme Sargent wrote a long minute that was a classic of FO procrastination – setting out possible courses of action and being pessimistic about all of them.⁴¹ In the same vein, Cadogan said that he, like others, wanted to start discussions with the Soviets, to move the alliance forward, but

39 Clark Kerr meeting with Dominions High Commissioners, 2 December 1942 DO121/12, and at COS(42)346th meeting 15 December 1942 CAB79/87.

40 Ronald minute 29 October 1942 FO371/31535/U1742.

41 Sargent minute 22 May 1942 FO371/32569/W9623. Sargent got himself in a tangle of indecision by considering discussion on postwar issues to be important, while also writing that with the disposition of forces at the end of the war unknown, it was premature to enter into any discussion.

could not think of any appropriate subject – the obvious topic, confederations, was too problematic to raise, and there did not seem to be anything else.⁴²

This remained the position until Stalin's November speech. Though the E & R department pushed for more active diplomacy, the Northern Department doubted whether the Soviets had any interest in discussions on postwar matters – but felt that were Britain to go ahead and do so with other allies, the USSR would accuse Britain, as in the Hess case, of being in breach of the consultation commitment in the Anglo–Soviet Treaty. Like Sargent's 22 May minute, this opinion was typical of the way that FO officials tended to over-signify the different sides of a matter until inaction seemed the only wise course.⁴³ However, with the feeling that Stalin had opened the door, a meeting of FO heads of department was held on 12 November, and concluded that some discussions should now be actively sought – even if both British and Soviet bureaucracies had yet to 'clear their minds'.⁴⁴ Those second-level officials wanting a more active approach pressed that the reserve advanced in Sargent's minute in May simply could not be maintained any longer. The Soviets, they argued, would assume that discussions with the other allies were taking place, and if not themselves asked to contribute their views, would have their suspicions reinforced that Britain preferred to exclude or isolate them. Unbeknownst to the officials, though Clark Kerr warned of it, this was exactly what was being suspected in the Soviet government, where there was bitterness that the British were disobeying their own 'self-denying ordinance'.⁴⁵ Frank Roberts, of the Central Department, made the suggestion that the way to start discussions that avoided the awkward implications of some topics would be to ask about Stalin's 'interesting remarks' about Germany – a suggestion that ultimately, as we will see, caused the initiative to founder.⁴⁶ Sargent was persuaded, and was prepared to move forward.⁴⁷

Simultaneously, the specific anxieties of officials concerned with south-eastern Europe were raised with regards to the likely Soviet interest in the region, and how Britain might act to protect its own interests there. The FO Southern Department, which dealt with the region, had a long-established suspicion of the USSR, and received sympathetically a long paper by George Rendel, the ambassador to the Yugoslav government-in-exile. Rendel feared that the USSR would intervene in Bulgaria at the end of the war, in line with traditional Russian policy – but from there it would seek to spread communism rapidly into the rest of the Balkans.

42 Cadogan minute 17 June 1942 FO371/32569/W9623.

43 Warner minute 4 November 1942 FO371/31535/U1742.

44 Warner note 26 November 1942 FO371/35338/U321.

45 Head of the Second European Department of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, K.V. Novikov wrote a lengthy complaint to Deputy Commissar Vyshinsky detailing British failures to adhere to the practice of consultation, 11 January 1943: document available at the website of the LSE Ideas Project on British Soviet Relations: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/Projects/bara/years.aspx> (hereafter cited as LSE Ideas Project).

46 Roberts note 25 November 1942 FO371/35338/U321.

47 No minutes were taken of the meeting, which consisted of Sargent, Warner, Jebb and Nigel Ronald, but the result was a memorandum by Jebb on 23 November of subjects to discuss with Maisky, FO371/35338/U321.

He proposed that Britain should concert action with Turkey, including Turkish intervention, in order to prevent this happening.⁴⁸ The Southern Department had a quite different take on Soviet intentions to that which had been the basis of the Four Power Plan. Their first response was written, as was the normal FO practice, by the most junior official, Edward Rose, and is one of the most unreservedly anti-Soviet minutes to be found in the FO papers for the Grand Alliance period. Its opening set the tone: 'I have no doubt that the Soviet Government, as at present minded, is likely to be a serious obstacle to the post-war organisation of a peaceful and prosperous European comity of nations.' Rose believed that all nations bordering the USSR preferred 'the German jackboot' to the 'kindly dominion of Mother Russia'. The attraction of a large Balkan confederation to this department was that it would provide an outlet for nationalism on the part of the ethnic groups in the region under the umbrella of a strong overarching political unit, which could resist outside interference (they had only the USSR in mind as the source of this). By containing national tensions, the confederation would remove the pretexts and opportunities for intervention and the possibilities of exploiting national feelings in order to advance the spread of communism. It would negate any attempt by the Soviet Union to adopt the Tsarist ploy of posing as the guardian of pan-Slavism.⁴⁹

Rendel's alarmism combined with the continuing concern about the practicalities of establishing stable regimes in the occupied states as quickly as possible after allied liberation. At the start of 1943, it seemed quite possible that this liberation would involve Anglo-US forces, as the USSR was still to achieve any meaningful progress towards liberating its own territory, let alone anyone else's. If Allied forces were all to be involved together, then it seemed necessary that some procedures and principles be agreed in advance. This gave another reason to open discussions with the Soviets. To those who had framed the Four Power Plan, the Southern Department fears were misplaced, and the policies Rendel was proposing were likely to be counter-productive.⁵⁰ If the best way of stopping Soviet penetration of the Balkans was the creation of confederations, and on this there was broad agreement, then Soviet approval for them had to be gained.⁵¹ The pathway to this seemed to the E & R and Northern Departments to be the reaching of general agreements – or at the least establishing cooperation at a general level: the practice of consultation and negotiation. Doing this would hopefully convince the Soviets of British good intentions and remove or reduce their suspicions about the objective of the confederations. It was clearly seen that the issue itself would need considerable finesse – because to a degree the Soviet suspicions were well-founded. The confederations *were* directed against the USSR – not in the sense the Soviets would

48 Rendel despatch FO371/33154/R8820. D. Livanios, *The Macedonian Question: Britain and the Southern Balkans 1939–1949* (Oxford 2008), 107–11.

49 Rose minute 30 December 1942, Howard minute FO371/33154/R8820. Central Department officials Frank Roberts and Pierson Dixon similarly had commented that Europeans would not regard the exchange of German rule for Soviet as a good deal, minutes 1 and 2 October 1942. FO371/32918/N4912.

50 Jebb minute 7 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820.

51 Roberts minute 5 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820. Sargent minute 8 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8821.

most apprehend, as a means of creating an anti-Soviet bloc, but certainly as a way of reducing the potential for Soviet expansionism by removing the temptation to move into a power vacuum.⁵² If the Soviets were truly hoping for such a vacuum, then there would be insuperable difficulties. But the new *démarche* was based on two assumptions: that talking in a general way at the official level could melt away suspicions, and that the USSR's ambitions in the Balkans were limited.⁵³ The best way forward therefore was building Anglo-Soviet-US collaboration within the framework of the Four Power Plan, working with the Soviets to break down their suspicions. Genuine collaboration would then follow.⁵⁴

The E & R department was particularly anxious to get moving with the Soviets. In considering the Moscow embassy's final report of the year 1942, John Eltringham Coulson of that department noted that while the Soviets may be pre-occupied with the war and their own internal postwar problems, which made getting their views on postwar issues difficult, it was important to do so:

There may well be a real danger of our being unable to wait for Soviet decisions and being tempted to go ahead without obtaining their co-operation. If so, Russia might be forced into isolation...anything we can do now to encourage their interest in international problems will constitute a valuable saving of time.⁵⁵

Consequently, therefore, in mid-December, Sargent and middle-ranking FO officials met with Clark Kerr to discuss the possibility of initiating discussions with the Soviets on postwar problems. Sargent was convinced that the good reasons he had found for inaction back in May had been over-ridden by the course of the war and by the need to make progress in building cooperation with the USSR and in particular in discussing how to avoid eastern Europe collapsing into chaos.⁵⁶ Cadogan and Eden both agreed that Clark Kerr should 'take soundings' of the present attitude of Stalin on the question of the postwar reconstruction of Europe.⁵⁷

52 In addition, fear of Soviet imperialism as well as German revenge were seen to be potential cement to hold the states within confederations and subsume their petty rivalries, as Sargent had noted, 29 January 1942 FO371/32841/W1823.

53 Jebb minute 7 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820; Jebb remarks noted by Dalton in his diary for 10 January – it was high time talks with the Soviets began on the future of Europe. So long as the British refused, their suspicions were most natural.

54 Warner minute 2 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820. Warner's response to Rose and Howard was: 'I personally think that (assuming that Russia is not reduced to a state of impotence before the end of the war), our only chance of preventing the Balkans from falling completely under Russian control will be by securing Russian agreement to Anglo-Russo-American collaboration there (within the framework of the 'Four Power Plan'). Moreover, general policy towards the Soviet Government is to work to break down their suspicions and achieve real cooperation'.

55 Roberts believed that were a detailed statement of Soviet views not to be gained soon, then troubles between the Czechs and Poles would have crystallized 'to such an extent that all our projects for confederations in Eastern Europe will have suffered a serious and perhaps final setback'. Coulson minute 7 January 1943, Roberts minute 12 January 1943 FO371/35338/U67.

56 Sargent minute 11 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820.

57 Sargent minute 11 January, Cadogan note 13 January, Eden minute 14 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820.

The documentary record gives no indication at all that there was any feeling that this was something that ran against the prime minister's wishes. FO officials were acting on the understanding that it was very much their proper business to move ahead with such issues at the foreign ministerial and official level. They felt that on purely European questions this did not have to be left until after discussion had begun with the Americans.⁵⁸

It was further decided to conduct the discussions through Clark Kerr in Moscow. This channel was preferred over Eden speaking to Maisky in London, which had been the initial intention, for three reasons. One was that it would strengthen Clark Kerr's position in Moscow. A second was that a quicker response could be expected: Maisky would always have to refer back to Moscow himself before making any commitment. Third, Maisky had been very bothersome in his second front agitation and cutting him out of the process would be a satisfying payback. It was also doubted how close he was to the latest thinking in Moscow: he was not, after all, a Molotov appointee.⁵⁹ This was to be a highly significant decision for the outcome of the *démarche*, and crucially it was not based on any estimate of the readiness of Molotov to engage in the kind of vague scene-setting discussions that were envisaged. It was thus to be on one hand a direct approach to the Soviet foreign commissar, and at the same time just an invitation to do no more than muse on the issues informally. A great deal of time was spent devising the *démarche*, and many significant issues were thrown into the mix, with Clark Kerr's approach to be carefully scripted: yet the informality of it all was stated clearly when it was mooted whether Molotov should be told in advance that the approach was going to be made. It was decided that he should not be, on the grounds that it would lead him to expect more than was actually being proposed.⁶⁰ That Molotov would do so anyway, because of the fact of the approach to him, and that, moreover, Clark Kerr would frame his questions as a significant *démarche* because of the length and complexity of his instructions, was overlooked.

The impression is given that the FO itself was conflicted as to what it thought it was doing, and given the input of the different departments and acquiescence, without firm direction, from Eden, this is not surprising. There were two conflicting motivations behind the approach, gaining their strength from divergent attitudes towards the prospects of long-term cooperation with the USSR and towards more short-term tactics. These attitudes were rooted in the cultures of the different political departments of the office that were involved in considering the future of Europe. Rendel's anxiety regarding Soviet aims in the Balkans focused attention on the need to get some kind of Soviet agreement to limit their own freedom of action in the region by a consensus on political arrangements in advance of their armed forces arriving there. Warner in the Northern Department shared a desire to probe this question, but he and the E & R department were more interested in using

58 Sargent minute 22 December 1942 FO371/35338/U321.

59 Sargent minute 22 December, Eden minute 23 December 1942 FO371/35338/U87.

60 Cadogan minute 11 January, Eden minute 12 January 1943 FO371/35338/U321.

preliminary discussions to promote a sense of common policy to build the habit of cooperation. It would be part, Warner noted, of the general policy of breaking down Soviet suspicions and achieving real cooperation.⁶¹ Jebb's department was particularly keen to start discussions on something – anything – as a means to reduce suspicions.

The démarche had thus developed from a plan for a few remarks by Eden to Maisky, beginning with an enquiry about Stalin's 'interesting remarks' about Germany, to an attempt to agree a basic common interest in ensuring that European affairs did not descend into chaos at the end of the war.⁶² The detailed final instructions to Clark Kerr implied an approach of some significance, rather than merely a casual, low-key enquiry. In acknowledgement of this, the instructions were shown to Dominions Prime Ministers, though not to the British Prime Minister. Churchill, out of the country at the Casablanca conference, was thus in ignorance of what was being proposed.

A carefully-outlined sequence was set out for the ambassador to follow with Molotov – even though the end point was merely to find out how Soviet thoughts were tending: whether indeed, in common FO parlance, they had 'begun to clear their minds' on the issue of postwar Europe. It was not intended that Clark Kerr would actually press forward to any negotiations on precise points, let alone reach agreement. The instructions set the aims of the initiative in broad terms from the start, declaring that Eden (the despatch was sent, as was customary, in his name) had for some time been considering what measures could be taken to 'facilitate and encourage Soviet co-operation in the post-war settlement'. It was vital in this regard to treat the Soviet Government as partners, and to 'make a habit of discussing plans and views with them as a matter of course'. This was the only way to break through the 'crust of suspicion' resulting from historic Anglo-Soviet relations and their widely differing institutions. To avoid giving offence to the Soviets, Britain should try wherever possible to consult simultaneously with the US and Soviet governments: indeed, it might help ease Soviet suspicions 'if we on occasions consult them before the United States Government. For instance, in questions relating to Eastern Europe or to reparation, it may well be desirable to open discussions with the Soviet Government first'. Clark Kerr was told that the Stalin speech signalled greater cooperation, and Allied victories and Clark Kerr's own return to Moscow offered an opportunity to review plans, opportunities and the possibilities of co-operation between the major Allied powers. The implication of this language is that a new phase in Anglo-Soviet collaboration was anticipated.

61 Warner minute 2 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820.

62 Sargent minute 11 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8820: '... the Russians would be no more than human if they did not attempt to turn to their own advantage any developments in the Balkans favourable to themselves... On the other hand, I am not convinced that the Soviet Government are consciously planning to dominate the Balkans by means either of Bolshevisation or Pan-Slavism. The Soviet Government has publicly endorsed on many occasions the principle of non-intervention... the present trend of Soviet policy, so far as one can judge, appears to be against unlimited expansion...' Eden noted his agreement on 14 January to Sargent's minute and the proposal within it to start discussions with the Soviets to prevent the region collapsing into chaos at the end of the war.

Clark Kerr was not left to develop the potential of the situation for himself. He was given specific topics to raise, and the sequence to do so, in order to engineer the development of the discussion precisely. He was to begin by celebrating recent exchanges on treatment of war criminals as an example of how matters might be dealt with in a 'frank and friendly way'. This would then lead to reference to speeches by Eden on 2 December, US Under-secretary of State Sumner Welles on 17 November and Stalin's own speech as showing general agreement that the Anglo-American-Soviet coalition be continued after the war, and that the issues of the peace settlement be discussed by the coalition in advance. Clark Kerr was then to say that British views were not yet developed on most of those issues, but to indicate what had been done so far, and to ask the Soviets how far they had also done preparatory studies, 'to supplement the indications given to me by Stalin in Moscow in December 1941 and those arising out of the negotiations in London last May'. He was to ask whether the Soviets had 'reached the stage of clearing their own minds' and when and how would they contemplate opening serious discussions.

Clark Kerr was then to seek clarification of Stalin's statements about Germany, by comparing them with what he had said to Eden. Later the FO claimed this was just an 'opening gambit' to get the conversation going, but the despatch instructed Clark Kerr to then discuss the German problem, and the need for an allied occupation 'for a considerable period' after the war. He should then move on to what was described as 'the main substance of your *démarche*': the need for the Allies to pursue an agreed policy for Europe as a whole. The object was to extract from Molotov, if possible, an assurance that the Soviet Government agreed that 'none of the three Great Powers should run a policy of its own in opposition to, or behind the backs of, the others'. Thus, while it was not intended that Clark Kerr propose, or engage in discussions on, specific policies, the scope and subject of his discussions and the response desired from the Soviet Government was significant and involved key principles. This was not a minor initiative in the minds of those who designed it.

Clark Kerr was, however, told also to move onto more concrete issues. After raising the idea that joint agreements on what to do in the occupied countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, when the Axis began to withdraw, were necessary to prevent a collapse into chaos, he was told to try and get clarification of whether the Soviet government opposed the formation of Polish-Czech and Greek-Yugoslav confederations. Once again, Stalin's statement to Eden on 16 December 1941, as noted in the British record as a precise quotation, was cited as an earlier statement of policy. What was wanted was confirmation, or otherwise, of where the Soviet government now stood, in view of statements made by Bogomolov. The instructions dwelt at some length on this issue: this had not been the original objective of the *démarche*, but had been added in after the internal debate following the Rendel despatch, mainly on the initiative of Jebb's department, in the hopes of giving authority within the FO to the optimistic perspective it had been arguing.⁶³

63 FO despatch 56 to Moscow 4 February 1943 FO371/35338/U321.

While the ambassador was present in London some of the time during January and early February (he spent most of his leave in Scotland), the record gives little evidence of him proffering advice on how the *démarche* should be shaped.⁶⁴ The initiative was out of line with Clark Kerr's sense of what the main issue was with the Soviets. To him, the key to clearing political issues and to the development of real cooperation lay in making progress with the Second Front, and his contacts with the military planners in London had led him to be deeply pessimistic in this regard, and to fear the worst. In this context, the arcane calculations of the FO's staged and scripted approach must have seemed tangential to the really vital issues of Anglo-Soviet relations. Clark Kerr's lack of sympathy with the initiative was to be reflected in the somewhat mechanical way he was to carry it out.

Having been delayed in his return journey for a week by the weather, Clark Kerr saw Molotov on 20 February.⁶⁵ The idea that progress was more likely if Molotov was addressed directly, rather than through Maisky, was immediately proved to be flawed. Clark Kerr reported that initially Molotov was in a friendly and jocular mood. The opening discussion about cooperation went smoothly, and Molotov seemed pleased that the British government intended to consult the Soviet government on all issues. He said that military preoccupations had meant their study of them had been preliminary, and they had not cleared their own minds: when they had, they would be ready to open serious discussions. All went well until Clark Kerr moved to the issue of Germany and Stalin's speech. Molotov was obviously disconcerted at being called upon to explain inconsistencies in the utterances of his boss: he 'showed discomfort and seemed to be unable or unwilling to understand the nature of our enquiry'. Stalin, he said, had made a similar statement in his Order of the Day of 23 February 1942 and the British had said nothing then. Clark Kerr reported that a prolonged and tortuous discussion followed. The ambassador thought Molotov was afraid to commit himself without consulting his chief. He asked whether Britain wished to destroy Germany. The conversation had gone on two hours and they parted, agreeing to revert to the topic at an early date. The *démarche* had thus not got beyond the introductory niceties before reaching an impasse – because there was no such thing as mere scene-setting with the literal-minded and serious Molotov. Instead it became ensnared in a quagmire of heavy-handed misunderstanding that lasted the best part of two hours. Clark Kerr's attempt to clear the way then got him into further trouble, all on an issue tangential to the main point of the approach. Rather than leave Molotov with a faulty

64 Clark Kerr saw the discussion on Rendel's despatch, but declined to give any detailed views on it. He agreed to make the approach, though his minute doing so does not overflow with enthusiasm. Clark Kerr note 28 January 1943 FO371/33154/R8821. Clark Kerr complained to Hugh Dalton on 8 February that FO officials were out of touch with realities in the USSR, though it might be noted that such a complaint chimed in with Dalton's own prejudices – and Dalton in return described Clark Kerr as 'the best of our diplomats', diary 8 February 1943.

65 Churchill to Stalin 17 February 1943 explained Clark Kerr's delay, without mentioning the *démarche*, about which Churchill knew nothing, *Stalin's Correspondence with Churchill and Attlee 1941–1945* (Moscow 1957), 96.

understanding of what he had meant, the ambassador decided to clarify his meaning in a personal letter.⁶⁶

Molotov's sense of the discussion was somewhat different to Clark Kerr's. Molotov noted that Clark Kerr said he intended to discuss matters of Anglo-Soviet cooperation after the war and that he would need to have several meetings. Britain intended to consult the US and Soviet Governments on all matters concerning the postwar settlement once it had formed a clear idea about them itself. Basing himself on Molotov's account, Maisky described Clark Kerr as starting to 'display almost feverish levels of activity'.⁶⁷ Molotov then said that Clark Kerr asked for clarification of Stalin's statement that there was no intention to annihilate Germany. Britain thought this wise, and good propaganda, but asked if it meant Stalin had changed his mind, as on 16 December he had told Eden he wanted the separation of Austria and East Prussia, and possibly Bavaria, which Eden took to mean the annihilation of Germany (Clark Kerr's account makes no use of the word 'annihilation'). According to Molotov, he said he did not understand what was not clear in Stalin's statement. After all, the British saw it to be good propaganda and very wise. Stalin could provide the best answer, but Molotov's view was that Germany was one thing and Austria quite another: the separation of East Prussia or other regions from Germany was one thing and keeping Germany a single state was another. Molotov noted Clark Kerr as saying he would pass this on to London. From this account, Molotov does not appear to have been confused by what Clark Kerr was asking. The problem seems to have been that for a year the British had read their record of Stalin's views in such a way as to interpret 'weaken Germany' as to mean 'break Germany up'. The confusion was on their part, not Molotov's, for they were asking why Stalin had departed from a view he had not expressed in the first place.

Unsurprisingly, Molotov then asked whether the British thought it necessary to annihilate Germany since they were asking about that: he was reading the remarks as a serious attempt to agree a policy on this matter. Clark Kerr evaded the question and promised to ask London – he had not actually been briefed to discuss this issue at all, just to 'raise it' to get conversation going. According to Clark Kerr's account, he did not raise a second, related, query, about Stalin's statement about not destroying the German army. According to Molotov, he did – though as Molotov's account was written after their follow-up discussion on 25 February, perhaps he did so then (though that is not how Molotov's account reads). Molotov said he saw no contradiction with statements about disarming the aggressors, but he would pass the points on to Stalin.⁶⁸

Clark Kerr's private letter to Molotov, reiterating the enquiry, would no doubt have fixed in Soviet minds that this was an issue on which the British wanted to

66 Clark Kerr to FO tel 93 21 February 1943 FO371/35338/U871.

67 G. Gorodetsky, *The Maisky Diaries. Red Ambassador to the Court of St James's 1932–1943* (New Haven, CT 2015), entry for 26 February 1943.

68 Molotov to Maisky 26 February 1943 in Anatoli Filev, 'New Documents about Winston Churchill from Russian Archives', *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 47 (2001), 141–3.

reach agreement, though in fact it was not a central part of the démarche. Clark Kerr does not appear to have provided the FO with a copy of the letter, but although they had not seen it, the FO's reaction to the sending of it was not at first negative. However, it was the response, by Stalin himself, that threw the whole matter into jeopardy – and from the British side, not the Soviet.⁶⁹

At midnight on 24 February, Clark Kerr saw Stalin. He passed over a gift of a couple of Dunhill pipes. Stalin was in an 'almost benign mood'. Clark Kerr's task, apart from genial exchanges, to which Molotov also, following the lead of his chief, contributed, was to pass on Churchill's paper titled 'Morning Thoughts'. Churchill had written this off the cuff while on an impromptu visit to the Turkish president at the end of January.⁷⁰ The existence of the document had become known, and Clark Kerr was instructed to explain that it was written for Turkish eyes and the issues were therefore put to them in a certain way, as Churchill hoped Stalin would understand. Stalin grunted assent. Clark Kerr then made a personal plea about his social contacts in Moscow. He was, he said, isolated and friendless, and the only intellectual stimulation he got was from Molotov and Stalin (Stalin grunted again in response to that piece of gratuitous flattery).⁷¹ Clark Kerr was told that in the USSR these things took time.

As Clark Kerr was leaving (at 1.30 in the morning), Stalin gave him a written reply to the letter to Molotov.⁷² Clark Kerr's interrogation of Stalin's public utterances had obviously been taken very seriously, and was treated not only as a challenge, but also as an initiative intended to lead to a proper diplomatic agreement. Although Stalin had agreed to the non-specific Anglo-Soviet Treaty, which had, in a way, kept his options free for the future, he still preferred definite agreements – 'arithmetic'. What is more, Stalin's comments undermined the whole basis

69 There is no copy of this 'personal and private letter' in the FO files, nor in the Moscow embassy files or Clark Kerr's papers. While Soviet files containing other papers presented in the démarche are available, such as the Clearing Union plan, and 'Morning Thoughts', and Stalin's letter in reply, Clark Kerr's original letter is not – though another letter by him to Molotov also dated 21 February, about a proposed mission of surgeons, has been published, Clark Kerr letter to Molotov 21 February 1943, Document 187 Советско-английские отношения vol. 1, 343. Molotov files at <http://agk.mid.ru/fonds/sekretariat-v-m-molotova/sekretariat-v-m-molotova/5/> have the other papers; see also В.О. Печатов, И. Э. Магдеев, *Переписка Сталина с Рузвельтом и Черчиллем в годы Великой Отечественной войны. Документальное исследование Том 1* (Moscow 2015), 377.

70 Churchill to Attlee, Cyprus, 1 February 1943 PREM4/30/2. Except for Cadogan, who was travelling with him, Churchill had consulted no-one in the FO, not even Eden, before producing this document: see Sargent comments in Lockhart diary 7 February 1943. Some have seen it, indeed, as a riposte to Eden's Four Power Plan paper, Gladwyn, *Memoirs*, 123. W. Churchill, *A History of the Second World War vol IV: The Hinge of Fate* (London 1951), 636–7. Churchill wished to base future British influence as a great power on leading Europe through a regional council: the FO and Eden felt that this would prompt the US to retreat into isolation, leaving Britain to run Europe, and restrain Germany, on its own if the Soviets were not cooperative. Soviets and Americans would fear a council of Europe would be a sphere of influence, K. Larres, *Churchill's Cold War: The Politics of Personal Diplomacy* (New Haven, CT 2002), 73–81.

71 Clark Kerr letter to Warner 28 Feb FO800/301. Given the extent of NKVD surveillance of foreign diplomats, it is unlikely that Stalin was uninformed about Clark Kerr's sexual adventurism, so the multiple layers of meaning in Clark Kerr's complaint probably did not escape him: given Stalin's earthy sense of humour, his grunt may well have been a stifled guffaw.

72 Clark Kerr to FO telegram 105 25 February 1943 FO181/973/20.

for British estimation of Soviet aims since December 1941. Stalin said that enquiring the meaning of public statements held out no promise of success. Neither did the method of quoting from personal conversations which had not led to any agreement, and which had, moreover, not been recorded. Thus, the British had no justification for treating their record of Stalin's December 1941 statements to Eden as in any way definitive statements of policy, as they had done throughout 1942.⁷³ All that mattered were written agreements. As Stalin pointed out, he had said this to Eden at the time, and Eden had declined, having no wish, as Stalin saw it, to be bound by such an agreement. Stalin ended by saying that the offer still held, and he clearly indicated that this was the proper basis for developing an alliance and agreeing its aims:

only one correct method exists – that of a meeting between official representatives of both states and the reaching of an agreement, which would be binding on both parties...Should...the British Government now consider it necessary to arrange such a meeting and to come to an agreement with the Soviet Government on the question of the fate of Germany or of other states, the Soviet Government are prepared to meet them half way.⁷⁴

Stalin, then, made clear that informal comments do not count for anything when there is no agreed record. Thus, the FO's wished-for frank exchange could indeed take place – but only when the intended outcome was a specific agreement. There was no place for preliminary discussions 'to clear our minds': for the Soviets that simply was not how diplomacy, or alliances, worked.

Private opinion in the Northern Department was that useful initial progress had been made, and Molotov's pleasure at being approached in advance of the Americans was seen as a positive point. However, there was now some alarm in the rest of the FO. The approach had, in a way, been too successful, and it had exposed the deep unreadiness of the British themselves to actually confront post-war issues, even though Northern and E & R department advocates had been urging the need to get into discussions with the Soviets. Eden betrayed his preference for the vaguest of discussions by indicating, even before Churchill got wind of the dialogue with the Soviet leaders, that he wished to go slow. Eden's private secretary, Oliver Harvey conveyed this to the departments on 25 February. Eden then scrawled on Clark Kerr's report of Stalin's desire for proper 3-power talks, 'What do I say to this?'⁷⁵ On Saturday 27 February a FO meeting concluded that Clark Kerr should not have written the letter, but conceded that Stalin's response,

73 For instance, Douglas Howard of the Southern Department had written on 23 March 1942 'we know perfectly well what the Soviet aims are, as a result of the Moscow conversations' FO371/32918/N1602.

74 Stalin letter contained in Clark Kerr to FO telegram 113 25 February 1943 FO371/35338/U888.

75 Harvey note 25 February 1943 and FO371/35338/U821. Eden subsequently drastically misrepresented his role in his memoirs, claiming credit for the approach to the Soviets and saying nothing of the prime minister's intervention: Lord Avon, *The Reckoning* (London 1965), 366–8.

though more vigorous than they wanted, was not unpromising, since he did, after all, want to have talks. Perhaps Stalin could be told that since Eden was soon to travel to Washington, then further progress should wait until the Americans had been sounded out – thus it was the FO that wished to procrastinate and avoid formalizing the alliance around agreed war aims, not the Soviets.⁷⁶

However, the letter from Stalin had inevitably reached Churchill's eyes. The prime minister, recovering from the bout of pneumonia that laid him low since 16 February, asked pointedly, 'What brought this up?'⁷⁷ Warner recounted privately to Clark Kerr that Churchill, on seeing the telegram, had 'emitted a series of the most vicious screams from his sickbed and ordained that the whole subject of post-war matters should be dropped at once like the hottest of hot bricks'.⁷⁸ Churchill's anger was directed at Eden, with whom he was at the same time having an argument over France.⁷⁹ Eden acted like a naughty child caught in the act and blamed Clark Kerr for supposedly going beyond his instructions. Sargent told Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart later in the year that Eden tried also to pass the blame down onto his officials, but he (Sargent) had carefully kept the papers that showed Eden's approval of Clark Kerr's instructions and his knowledge of the formulation of the *démarche* from its early stages.⁸⁰

Stalin had immediately moved the matter to the level of formal negotiations, for which the FO, let alone Churchill, were not ready. Once again the gulf between the two allies was revealed in terms of their culture of diplomatic interaction. But in this instance, as Warner noted patronisingly, their way of doing things was not to be taken as indicative of their intentions or attitudes: it was not a matter of 'distaste for cooperation', but merely 'lack of practice'.⁸¹

After Churchill's intervention, and Eden's unreadiness to defend his, and his department's, position with the prime minister, Clark Kerr was ordered sharply not to proceed further, and not to enter into a written correspondence with Molotov or Stalin.⁸² Warner complained to the ambassador that a great opportunity had been missed because the prime minister had ordered the discussion of postwar matters dropped.⁸³ In fact, as Churchill himself had raised such matters in 'Morning Thoughts', what he had done was assert his own authority over postwar issues,

76 Meeting in the FO of Sargent, Ronald, Dew and Jebb 27 February 1943 FO371/35338/U888; Warner to Clark Kerr 16 March 1943 FO800/301.

77 Churchill 26 February note on Clark Kerr telegram FO371/35338/U888.

78 Warner to Clark Kerr 16 March 1943 FO800/301.

79 Warner to Clark Kerr 26 March 1943 FO800/301: Harvey diary 26 February 1943.

80 Lockhart diary 12 August 1943. Eden to Churchill 1 March 1943 FO371/35338/U888. Eden had to remove the first paragraph of the draft of this minute to Churchill as it invited Churchill to recall the instructions to Clark Kerr, which Eden knew Churchill had not seen, and indeed from his first response to Clark Kerr's telegram about his conversation with Stalin, seemed himself to have forgotten about.

81 Warner minute 4 August 1943 FO371/36925/N4375. Sargent at this time reiterated his belief that it was necessary for Britain to spell out its views in such a frank exchange: 'we should without delay put our cards on the table and show that we are ready to discuss with them questions such as the Polono-Russian frontier, the future of Germany, the handling of the states of Central Europe, the Balkans, etc.' Sargent minute 28 July 1943 FO371/36925/N4253.

82 Eden to Clark Kerr 1 March 1943 FO371/35338/U888.

83 Warner to Clark Kerr 16 March 1943 FO800/301.

as well as his preference for controlling the lines of communication with Stalin.⁸⁴ While Warner and Sargent expressed their regret that a chance had been missed to develop the basis of the Anglo-Soviet relationship, when it had come to it, the FO had sheered away from seizing the opportunity, even before Cadogan, returning from his own bout of illness, sided with Churchill.⁸⁵

There was, therefore, no interest in continuing discussions, even though Clark Kerr had returned to his brief with Molotov before the order to stop. Molotov denied that Bogomolov had been expressing opposition to confederations: he had simply been reflecting 'public' views in Moscow that the peoples in the countries concerned would not like such deals being made by groups in London that were not necessarily representative. Molotov disingenuously claimed these views were widespread in Moscow, but 'not necessarily the view of the Soviet Government'.⁸⁶

The Soviets were clearly worried and perhaps somewhat flummoxed by the British inconsistency in raising and then avoiding discussion of the issue, and on 10 March Maisky revealed these anxieties by asking Eden not to enter into any definite postwar commitments with the USA during his visit to Washington and in effect keeping the *démarche* going a little longer. He went on clarify the position on Germany in a more categorical way than Stalin had done to Clark Kerr, while rather confusingly describing this as merely his personal view. He said the Soviet Government wished to see Germany broken up. According to Maisky's record in his diary, Eden raised this issue: in the FO record, it was Maisky who did so. Both records, interestingly, present the author as passive, with his interlocutor making all the running. Maisky's record makes no mention of the confederations issues, but according to Eden, the ambassador said the USSR was opposed to a Polish-Czechoslovak confederation unless Poland was friendly to the USSR.⁸⁷ Maisky saw himself as preparing Eden for his US mission by making clear the Soviet position on issues like the frontiers. There was clearly a Soviet concern that the British should not proceed with any bilateral arrangement in Washington, while also, as Clark Kerr had noted, pleased that the British had approached them first. Although Maisky's statements, as Eden recorded them, gave clear answer to questions to which the FO had earlier sought Soviet answers, Cadogan called this a 'rather curious communication' – presented, as it was, as Maisky's own

84 He was also much aware that Stalin would soon have to be told some very unpalatable news about Anglo-American strategic decisions, and about the suspension of convoys to the USSR in order to facilitate operations that they would regard as mere diversions. Raising political issues at such a time was hardly likely to be productive, or conducive to diplomatic give-and-take. Churchill minute to Cadogan 26 March 1943, Cadogan telegram to Clark Kerr 27 March 1943 PREM4/30/1.

85 Lockhart diary 12 August 1943. Geoffrey Wilson of the Northern Department commented at that time that 'the talks you started so successfully in February were abandoned through a bad fit of cold feet and nothing has happened since', letter to Clark Kerr 8 August 1943 FO800/301, having earlier opined that the talks begun by Clark Kerr 'came to an end because Stalin showed signs of wanting things on paper, no doubt with Polish frontier in mind...' minute 22 June 1943 FO371/37045/N4905. Cadogan confessed to finding long-term planning boring, diary 7 February, 20 June 1943.

86 Clark Kerr to FO 26 February, FO to Clark Kerr 13 March 1943 FO371/35338/U897.

87 Eden conversation with Maisky 10 March 1943 PREM4/30/1; Maisky diary entry for 11 March 1943.

views: though actually what had happened was that Maisky had followed the preferred British way of doing things by engaging in an informal exchange of views. It suggests that actually the *démarche* might have been better achieved by keeping it at the Eden-Maisky level as originally proposed. In any event, Cadogan recommended to Churchill, who was now acting as foreign secretary during Eden's absence in the US, the shutdown of any further discussion of postwar topics.⁸⁸

It is said, on the rare occasions when this episode is acknowledged in the literature, that nothing further happened simply because of Churchill's intervention. FO officials said as much in private, and the historiography has tended to take this opinion as authoritative.⁸⁹ However, it is clear that Eden was himself in two minds – or more – about the initiative, torn this way and that by the differences of approach, emphasis and inclination of his two main advisors, Sargent and Cadogan, and of the eloquent young officials in the different political departments – between whose views Eden showed little inclination to adjudicate or impose conformity. This was no doubt aggravated by the small amount of his working time that he actually devoted to his FO duties at this time – in some weeks less than a day's worth of work, according to his disgruntled assistant under-secretary.⁹⁰

FO officials tried to shift blame onto the ambassador, by arguing that the comments about Stalin's speech and the treatment of Germany were supposed merely to be an opening gambit, and that Clark Kerr was guilty of making too much heavy weather of this minor point. Actually, the fault really lay in the tortured formulaic instructions that failed to take account of the way that Molotov and Stalin could be expected to react to such an approach to them, and beyond that reflected a cultural gulf between the British and Soviet ways of doing diplomacy. The FO officials were strongly attached to the idea of informal, exploratory discussions at levels below the very highest, to move slowly and organically towards a 'meeting of minds'. Preliminary exchanges were a necessary stage to reaching agreement, especially when the Soviet government evidently found it difficult to send fully-empowered representatives to overseas conferences: that was what the *démarche* was seeking to do, and to Warner the reason for its failure was the Soviet inability to understand this practice. The Soviet system allowed so little autonomy to lesser officials that this was a completely alien way of working to them, and useless. Formal agreements reached by senior figures capable of making firm decisions and committing their governments came first in the Soviet view of diplomacy – lesser officials then followed the agreements, with nothing to do but occasionally add flesh to the bones, but more commonly just reiterate the precise wording that their leaders had agreed.

When Maisky was replaced by Fyodor Gusev in August 1943, Warner recollected Clark Kerr's mission. He noted that when Clark Kerr spoke to Molotov and Stalin about the future, they indicated that they preferred meetings of

88 Cadogan to Churchill 25 March 1943 PREM4/30/1.

89 Dalton diary 24 July 1943; Warner to Clark Kerr 16 March 1943 FO800/301; Ross, *Foreign Office and the Kremlin*, 32; Kitchen, *British Policy*, 150.

90 Sargent comment noted in Lockhart diary 7 February 1943.

plenipotentiaries, rather than exchanges of views at the regular diplomatic level.⁹¹ Here, in effect, we see two quite different cultures of alliance practice. The FO one involved keeping things vague and building up practice of cooperation as an organic thing. Partners 'clear their minds' while engaging in these constructive and frank discussions. The other approach involved basing alliance on firmly-agreed commitments, authoritatively negotiated and finalized. Then cooperation would happen, along the clear (if possibly limited) lines laid out. This divergence was indicative at heart of the cultures of the two bureaucracies, one an organic one, one a command one – or, to put it another way, one that put a premium on producing decisions, another that produced indecision. Looked at objectively, the Soviet approach seems the more practical and the more solid foundation on which to build an alliance between partners with no back-history of working together, indeed deeply suspicious of each other.⁹² For all their abstract commitment to an Anglo–Soviet–US alliance, the British – be it Churchill, Eden, or FO officials – shied away when the opportunity was offered by the Soviet readiness to talk business, at a time when progress might have been made. The customary description of British wartime policy as 'pragmatic' hardly seems deserved here.

Clark Kerr's 'feverish activity' thus had come to a juddering halt, with nothing to show for the effort. This was certainly not through a lack of response on the Soviet side. Indeed the Soviet reaction had been promising. One might even argue that they were the only ally, despite their heavy preoccupations on the battlefield, ready to build the alliance on solid foundations of agreed political aims. It was not because differences of principle had emerged, for the discussions had not got onto such territory. It was not because of US intervention. The US aspect was of importance, though, for there was certainly a concern not to move into discussions of specifics without knowing US views. But the problems really was that the FO's approach was too subtle, and too much based on soft concepts.

The cooperative school of officials in the FO (Warner, Jebb and others) were envisaging educating the Soviets to be better allies by increasing interaction and contacts. They felt one of the problems was that the Soviets did not understand the practice of diplomacy. This – a mission to educate the Soviet bureaucracy! – involved the sub-ministerial level. The 'clearing of minds' would be done on an official-to-official basis. The aim was entirely to create an atmosphere of cooperation – to get the Soviets used to that, and then they would be more likely to be amenable on specific issues. It was an approach that had been tried and had failed when Eden went to Moscow in December 1941.⁹³ As then, Stalin was ready to

91 Warner minute 4 August 1943 FO371/36925/N4375.

92 Stalin was consistent in this: back in November 1941 he had pressed the need for a 'definite understanding between our two countries concerning war aims and plans for the postwar organisation of peace': it was this that had prompted Eden's Moscow trip in December, Stalin to Churchill 8 November 1941, *Stalin's Correspondence*, 33.

93 Cripps letter to Molotov 19 December, Eden conversation with Stalin 20 December 1941 Rzheshesky, *War and Diplomacy*, 51, 54.

make an arrangement, but one based, as he had said to Eden, on 'arithmetic' not 'algebra'. The British were trying the vaguest of algebra again.

This was not, therefore, a matter of going behind the prime minister's back, but of trying to extend cooperation downwards from the top level, which was the level on which such progress as there was, was being made. But Churchill was drawn in straight away because the Soviet leadership could not conceive of conducting diplomacy in such a manner. For Churchill, moreover, the introduction of officials cut across the method he favoured – of dealing with Stalin as a 'comrade-in-arms'. He was still trying to focus on his relationship with Stalin as a fellow warlord, while also conscious that any approach would be soured by the strategic decisions pending that Stalin would dislike.⁹⁴ When he considered postwar issues – which was not, actually, averse to doing, he showed a preference for keeping the USSR out of European affairs as much as possible. Ironically, in the following year, he shifted to an acceptance of the advisability of making concrete arrangements: indeed he had recourse to 'arithmetic' of a very explicit kind in the 'percentages' proposal of October 1944.⁹⁵

At the top level of the FO, Cadogan's scepticism about allied cooperation and Eden's tendency to indecision and distraction combined to impede developments still further. Eden did share his officials' emphasis on the *practice* of cooperation, a point he pressed on Maisky at one of their final meetings in August 1943, when he said it was important to get used to working together.⁹⁶ Frustrations with dealing with multiple agencies in Washington had caused him to see the outcome-oriented, business-like attitude of the Soviets in a somewhat better light, as was to be confirmed when the alliance moved into a new phase with the Conference of Foreign Ministers in Moscow in October 1943.⁹⁷ At that time, the 'atmosphere' improved. There was a certain movement from both sides towards the other's approach. Although the Maisky channel of informal communication was closed off by his replacement with a more conventional Molotov-school Soviet diplomat, the Soviets relaxed a little in their readiness to engender an atmosphere of cooperation, as evidenced by Molotov's unprecedented geniality at the conference. The British came to see they needed to reach firmer agreements. These shifts were symbolized in a way in the creation of the European Advisory Commission at the Moscow Conference. In the eyes of the FO creators of this body, it was to be a forum for 'clearing of minds' and exchange of views on postwar issues, while to the Soviets it met Stalin's stated desire for proper three-power talks with a certain formality and with agreements in mind. As it turned out, it did not work entirely smoothly, because neither the Soviet nor the Americans would yield much decision-making

94 Churchill told Barrington-Ward of *The Times* that he had wooed Stalin 'like a maid', though he added, 'I do not want to be alone in Europe with the bear'. Barrington-Ward diary 29 March 1943, D. McLachlan, *In the Chair, Barrington-Ward of The Times, 1927–1948* (London 1971), 205.

95 M.H. Folly, "'A long, slow and painful road': the Anglo-American Alliance and the Issue of Cooperation with the USSR from Teheran to D-Day", *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 23, 3 (2012), 471–92.

96 Eden conversation with Maisky 31 August 1943 FO371/36956/N4977.

97 Harvey diary 13 March 1943.

to their delegates in London, but on the other hand it did come up with solutions to the short-term issues of the management of the transition from the chaos of war in Europe, as the FO officials had had in mind when they began the Clark Kerr démarche back in November 1942. In a way, therefore, the FO advocates of the démarche were proved correct – but of course the precondition was that by autumn of 1943, the Allies were delivering to the Soviets some more congenial strategic decisions.

What the stalled démarche did show, however, was that cooperative progress in the alliance was not out of the question because of ideological distance or fundamental principles. But the bureaucratic politics at multiple levels of the alliance, when added to the unfamiliarity of cooperation between the states more used to viewing each other with suspicion, and novelty of the channels of communication, meant that it was a challenge to achieve it. Cooperation was not impossible, but it was difficult, and ultimately needed full concentration on it by all the leadership at the top, to supply coherence, direction and persistence. Lacking these elements, it was always going to be elusive.

Biographical Note

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